

BaptistWay: Joseph gaining maturity

May 31, 2013

- *The BaptistWay lesson for June 16 focuses on Genesis 37:2-14, 18-28; 39:1-12.*

- [Download a powerpoint resource for this lesson here.](#)

Joseph is one of those biblical characters we love to love. In many ways, he seems to be perfect—young, handsome, honest, full of integrity, powerful and forgiving. But Joseph wasn't perfect. Like many teenagers, he was a little full of himself. He was spoiled, and he enjoyed letting his brothers know it. In other words, Joseph, in his youth, was a brat. But harsh circumstances and time worked together to mold Joseph into the man he became.

Genesis 37:2-11 might be called Joseph's brat era. During this time, several things set him apart from his brothers. First, Joseph was a shepherd like his brothers, and he was a "helper" to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher). He brought his father a bad report about his brothers (v. 2), which suggests Joseph, at the least, was a tattle-tale and, at the worst, a spy for Jacob. Certainly, this act did not endear him to those brothers, even if the report were true.

'Son of his old age'

Second, Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was Jacob's "son of his old age" (v. 3). Jacob did not display this favoritism judiciously. Rather, he lavished it upon Joseph, giving him a special robe that set him apart from the rest of his brothers. Traditionally, English translators have followed the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) in

describing this robe as a “coat of many colors.”

But the Hebrew simply calls it a “long-sleeved garment” that was possibly ornamented. Regardless, the coat made the brothers insanely jealous, and Jacob might as well have put a “kick me” sign on the back of the garment for all the good it did Joseph.

Third, Joseph was a dreamer. That, in and of itself, isn’t inherently bad. In fact, we discover later Joseph’s dreams were prophetic (Genesis 42:6; 44:14; 47:31; 50:13). But dreamers who boast about their grandiose dreams generally aren’t received favorably. Indeed, Joseph’s brothers were incensed over the sheaf dream, and even Jacob protested over the sun, moon and stars dream (vv. 8, 10-11).

Partly his own fault

In part, Joseph brought his brothers’ wrath upon himself by reporting on them and boasting about his brilliant future. In part, Jacob was responsible for the brothers’ hatred by showing overt favoritism to his beloved son. But none of these things justify the events that follow. Joseph, like any teenager, naïvely thought everyone would delight in his special status. He was wrong.

So, when Joseph was sent to check on his brothers and report back to Jacob (vv. 13-14), an opportunity presented itself. The brothers saw the brat coming and decided to kill him (v. 20). Fortunately for Joseph, Reuben intervened and suggested they merely throw Joseph into a pit. Reuben hoped to rescue Joseph later (vv. 21-22).

Conveniently, some foreign traders happened by while the brothers were eating lunch. So, the brothers—sans Reuben—decided to sell Joseph into slavery for 20 pieces of silver (vv. 25-28). Not only were they able to rid themselves of the brat, they made some money too.

Dipping Joseph's despised robe in the blood of a dead animal, they brought it back to Jacob claiming Joseph died by the claws of a wild beast (vv. 31-33). Jacob, understandably, was devastated (vv. 34-35).

Suddenly a slave

Suddenly, Joseph found himself demoted from favored son to slave. He was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, captain of the Pharaoh's guard (37:36; 39:1). Life circumstances forced Joseph to grow up—and fast.

The Lord was with Joseph, and because of this Joseph found favor with Potiphar. Soon, Joseph became overseer of Potiphar's house, and God caused Potiphar's house to prosper for Joseph's sake (39:2-6). In some ways, what Joseph lost in his own house, he found once again in Potiphar's—favor, status and security.

But Potiphar was not the only one to take notice of Joseph. Potiphar's wife also was impressed with the young man who was “well built and handsome” (v. 6). She told him to sleep with her (v. 7). Joseph refused, reminding the woman Potiphar had entrusted his entire house to Joseph. “My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (vv. 8-9).

One sign of maturity is learning to say “no.” And Joseph was forced to say “no” over and over to Potiphar's wife, who was persistent, to say the least (v. 10). Joseph learned that just because desirable things are offered to you, you don't have to take them.

Down into prison

Unfortunately, Potiphar's wife was not a woman to be denied. Sending the servants away, she propositioned Joseph one last time, grabbing his garment in her hand. Joseph fled, leaving his garment with her (vv. 11-12).

(Notice how garments always get Joseph into trouble?) Spurned, once again, Potiphar's wife cried, "Rape!" and her word was accepted as truth (vv. 13-19). Joseph fell again from grace and was thrown into prison (v. 20).

Joseph experienced multiple traumas in his life. His brothers hated him; they sold him into slavery; he was torn from a father who loved him dearly; he plummeted from favored son to slave; and, just when he was getting to a place of security and promise, he was accused falsely and thrown into prison.

What makes Joseph stand out is how he, with God's help, learned from his experiences. I don't believe Joseph merely took these devastating losses in stride. I suspect he suffered and asked "Why?" and grieved over the loss of his home, his status and his father. Yet Joseph became great because of how he allowed these injustices to shape him into a better, wiser, stronger person.

Most of us experience injustice in our lives. We know life does not always treat everyone fairly. We lose jobs, partners, houses and friends. We experience loss, sometimes due to our own mistakes; sometimes due to circumstances. And in such cases, it is natural to grieve, struggle, and ask, "Why?" But, with God's help, we may allow our experiences—bad and good—to shape and mold us into better, wiser, stronger people.